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LONG HOURS, HIGH SPIRITS, SENSE OF FAMILY KEEP DEPLOYED V CORPS TROOP'S MUSICAL DREAM ALIVE

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FORWARD OPERATING BASE BRASFIELD-MORA, Iraq -- Not only have Soldiers serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom here put their lives on the line, they put lives at home on hold.

But one V Corps Soldier here has found a way to keep on performing -- as a Soldier and a budding musician.

In fact, not only has Spc. Donald Baptiste, a food service specialist with the corps' 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, dining facility, continued moving toward his dream while he's deployed here, he found a way to include some of his comrades who share his passion.

Following a belief in reaching for every goal and taking hold of opportunities, Baptiste didn't let deployment stop him from pursuing his musical dreams. Devoting the little non-working time a food service specialist has to his aspiration, the specialist managed to create Trilogy Records -- a record label that already has five artists.

"Being in the military, goals are very crucial to this lifestyle. It teaches you everything has a purpose and a reason," Baptiste said. "With specific goals in mind, you aren't just out there floating around buying time."

Baptiste says while label is the culmination of a 10-year process, it's still in its infancy. "To me, Trilogy is a young child. You are with it from the beginning and you have to nurture it until it matures."

The road that led Baptiste in the direction of Trilogy began when he was a child himself.

As a 12-year-old in Fayetteville, N.C., he rapped with friends, testing his skills as an entertainer.

Fayetteville being a very Army town as well, it's not too surprising that Baptiste eventually put on a uniform to serve his country. In one of those odd twists lives often take, that decision actually helped lead Baptiste closer to his musical hopes. While stationed in Germany he began to meet people in the music industry who understood his desire for success in the music industry as an artist and businessman.

But it has been an exhausting trek as well. After a duty day here that begins at 4:30 a.m. and continues until 9 p.m., Baptiste -- known in music circles as "Big Bap" -- has had to work hard to keep his co-musicians' spirits high.

One of his morale boosters is an after-work open microphone session that brings members of Trilogy and co-workers together to fine-tune their craft by playing music and rapping unscripted verses.

"Besides open mike, we have cookouts and sometimes we tie each other up or wrestle. You know, doing things that guys do. ... We're like a family away from home."

And it's that word -- family -- that Baptiste says drives him to all his goals and dreams.

The specialist said his wife of five years, Maria, and two sons, 5-year-old Donald and 2-year-old Elijah, keep him moving toward his dream. He said he sees everything -- even joining the Army and deploying to Iraq -- as part a larger plan for his family.

"My family is my world. Everything I do is for them," Baptiste said. "I came into the Army for them, and the Army has given us not only a good life, but a bright future, too."

The drive that it takes for Baptiste to reach that future while putting in those long food service days has not gone unnoticed by those around him here.

"I began working with Baptiste in Schweinfurt, Germany, two years ago, and it has become evident to me that he is my right-hand man," said food service supervisor Sgt. Larry L. W. McElroy. "He's dependable, motivated and really thorough and loyal. What's sets him apart is the fact that he won't stop until the job is finished to my standard."

"Bap is always upbeat and full of energy. When we all get together, we are not only inseparable, but unstoppable," added coworker Spc. Robert Forster.

Batiste says Trilogy will head for the recording studio when he returns to Germany. Its debut album is scheduled for release in Germany in May, and in the U.S. in September.

If that release brings musical celebrity, there's no telling what the future might bring for the hard-charging specialist. But for now Baptiste says he isn't finished with his military goals.

"Right now I would like to extend my service to try to get back to the U.S., so that I can not only serve my country but also serve my family and my dreams," he said.

